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Research Article

Differentiated Integration and the Bologna Process

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to discuss the contribution of the theory of differentiated integration to understanding Bologna as an instrument for building up the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and to learn from that analysis what can be used to enrich the theory of differentiated integration. The analysis uses secondary data to grasp the national and the institutional appropriation of the Bologna process and to identify the dimensions that characterise the type of differentiated integration promoted by Bologna. The analysis underlines the role of national and institutional factors to understand how the EHEA, from its inception and its evolution, is a project of differentiated integration stemming from the translation of policy into action.

Keywords

Europe of knowledge; differentiated integration; European Higher Education Area; Bologna process

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In 1999, twenty-nine countries signed the Bologna declaration, setting the Bologna process in movement. The Bologna declaration was a political commitment to create the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), acting as its *modus operandi*. The declaration set out six objectives: the creation of readable and comparable degrees; a degree structure based on two main cycles; the establishment of a credit unit system; the promotion of mobility; the advancement of European cooperation in quality assurance; and, finally, a European dimension of higher education, steered by increasing mobility, employability, competitiveness and attractiveness. Following the signature of the declaration, Ministers engaged in biennial summits, both to refine priorities and to take stock of the progress made. Bologna was unique in that its influence extended to 47 states and laid down similar objectives for all, with a deadline of 10 years to achieve them.

The political goal of establishing the EHEA, as it aims at greater comparability and compatibility of European higher education systems, might be considered a case of differentiated integration as 'the territorial extension of the European Union [EU] membership and EU rule validity are incongruent' (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012: 292). On the one hand, the territoriality of the EHEA goes beyond the European Union membership and, on the other hand, the EU rule validity in education policies is incongruent. Actually, the harmonisation of laws and regulations of the member states is explicitly excluded by European treaties (§ 4, article 165 of the Consolidated version of the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union) and the EU can only take action by means of incentive measures in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedures, as education policy area is not subsumed by EU law. In other words, the EHEA as a case of differentiated integration implies widening this very concept and incentive measures are to be seen as privileged instruments to create and steer policies in the field of education.

The EHEA was designed at the intergovernmental level, being reconfigured as a EU policy driver when the European Commission, already empowered to intervene in research and innovation, acquired the status of full member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG). This reinforced role of the European Commission made higher education a pivotal area for the Europe of knowledge and the Bologna process was appropriated by the Lisbon strategy, while the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was used to promote convergent objectives of national policies among the EU members. The EU incentive

measures are supported by and articulated with reporting and evaluation procedures through the stocktaking process. These procedures are policy instruments promoting comparison between states and pulling national governments to take action towards the accomplishment of common objectives. These mechanisms of policy diffusion support the translation of policy into action or enactment (Ball 2004). In this sense, a broader concept of differentiated integration might allow for the capture of 'challenges involved with putting EU policy into practice, and particularly informal opt-out and the discretionary aspects of transposition and implementation' (Andersen and Sitter 2006: 3).

The relationship between the Bologna process and the EHEA is enlightened by the interpretations of actors in realising policy in and through practice. Interaction (Gornitzka, Kyvik and Stensaker 2005; Veiga 2012, 2014) and iteration (Neave and Veiga 2013) are crucial to understanding the diversity of interests and diverging expectations of actors placed at various levels. Bologna as a means to consolidate the EHEA is a dynamic process of policy enactment. In this sense, the EHEA can be seen as "policy as a moving target" (Wittrock and DeLeon 1985), feeding and being fed by significant differentiation and flexibility at the European, national and institutional levels, marked by the adoption of informal arrangements based on soft law mechanisms such as stocktaking processes.

Research about Bologna made visible the specificities of the policy process in the area of education policies (Maassen and Olsen 2007; Neave and Veiga 2013; Veiga and Amaral 2006, 2012). Less is known about Bologna as a case of differentiated integration. The theory of differentiated integration has been useful to understand the decisions that are made by states under the unanimity rule, and the role of "state-level factors" and "sub-systemic factors" has been recognised as important in triggering differentiation (Schimmelfennig et al. 2011). However, limitations in theorising causes or effects of differentiated integration (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012) have been identified in the literature, particularly with regard to differentiation in ordinary legislation or informal differentiation (Matarrelli 2012). Notwithstanding, the categorisation of different forms or models of flexible integration, as proposed by differentiated integration theories, is worth exploring, thus contributing to the potential broadening of the differentiated integration theory.

The objective of this article is twofold. On the one hand, it aims to answer the question of what is the contribution of the theory of differentiated integration to understanding Bologna as a process of policy enactment towards the establishment of the EHEA. On the other hand, it intends to contribute to the enrichment of that theory. In the first part of the article, we elaborate the theory of differentiated integration before proceeding to analyse data gathered in Germany, Italy, Norway and Portugal for understanding discretionary decisions and practices enacted at the national and institutional levels. We will address this by analysing the Bologna process on the basis of national agendas and of the perceptions of institutional actors. Finally, taking into consideration the models of differentiated integration (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012), the analysis of diverse configurations of Bologna aims to contribute to potentially broadening the theory of differentiated integration.

APPROACHING DIFFERENTIATED INTEGRATION

From the perspective of integration, flexible integration mechanisms (flexibility or differentiation) are often used interchangeably. Leo Tindemans used economic and financial factors to explain variation and the need to assume flexibility in EU policy decision-making:

> It is impossible at present time to submit a credible programme of action if it is deemed absolutely necessary that in every case all stages should be reached by all the States at the same time. The divergence of their economic and financial situations is such that, were we to insist on this progress would be impossible and Europe would continue to crumble away (1976: 20).

Flexibility is at the core of differentiated integration as it refers to 'the possibility for different member states to have different rights and obligations with respect to certain common policy areas' and it is a means to achieve more integration in the long run (Kölliker 2001: 125). Variations and disparities between the member states are often associated with the diversity of interests, the growing complexity of decision-making and diverging expectations towards integration (Emmanouilidis 2007). National conditions of cross-national policy convergence are associated with cultural, institutional and socio-economic factors (Heinze and Knill 2008).

In the framework of differentiated integration theory, the Bologna process has been presented as an example of *Flexible Integration* (at the start) and subsequently as an illustration of the *Europe à la carte* model (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012). Alexander Stubb (1996) made the first attempt to categorise differentiated integration using the variables "time" (multi speed), "space" (variable geometry) and "matter" (*à la carte*). Katharina Holzinger and Frank Schimmelfenning (2012) underlined that the variables "matter" and "space" 'are by definition involved in all types of differentiation' (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012: 296) and further developed a categorisation of differentiated integration. They proposed models of differentiated integration on the basis of six analytical dimensions:

(1) "Permanent" versus "temporary differentiation" underlines that the pursuit of European goals by member states can have different rates and paces;

(2) "Territorial" versus "purely functional integration" brings in the territorial range of authority and control;

(3) "Differentiation across member states" versus "multi-level differentiation" underlines the role of institutions placed at different levels;

(4) "Differentiation takes place within the EU treaties" versus "outside the EU treaties" brings in differentiation reflecting the enactment of European goals outside EU borders;

(5) "Decision-making at the EU level" versus "at regime level" brings in the issue of legitimacy and the workings of non-hierarchical systems;

(6) Differentiation "only for member states" versus "also for non-member" underlines the geographical blurring of borders.

These dimensions are expected to provide a heuristic device for the interpretation of the tensions arising from the integration processes. The analysis of these polarised dimensions is relevant as it is leading to a critical perspective with regard to these specific models of differentiated integration. From the perspective of political integration, nine out of the 10 models assume "permanent differentiation", while "temporary differentiation" is covered by only one model, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Models of differentiated integration

DIMENSIONS										
1	Temporary	Permanent								
2	Territorial									Functional
3	Differentiaion at national-level							Multi-level differentiation		
4	Only inside EU-treaties				Also outside EU-treaties			Only inside EU treaties	Also outside EU-treaties	
5	EU-decision making						Club-decision making (intergovernmental)			
6	Only member states			Also non-member states	Only member states	Also non-member states		Only member states	Also jurisdictions outside EU	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Models	**Multi-speed**	**Multiple standards**	**Avantgarde Europe**	**Core Europe, Concentric circles**	**Flexible integration**	**Variable geometry**	**Europe à la carte**	**Optimal level of jurisdiction**	**Flexible co-operation**	**FOCJ**
Examples	Many in secondary law	In secondary law, e.g. environmental policy	EMU, basic rights charta	EMU; EEA; associated states	Enhanced co-operation, Bologna (at the start)	Schengen	Bologna	Competence allocation in Lisbon Treaty	EUREGIOS	No example
References	Grabitz (1984); Stubb (1996, 2002)	Scharpf (1999)	Club von Florenz (1996)	Schäuble and Lamers (1984)	Centre for Economic Policy Research (1995)	Stubb (1996)	Dahrendorf (1979	Fischer and Schley (1999)	Holzinger 2001	Frey and Eichenbrger (1996, 1997)

Source: Adapted from Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012)

The model of *Two or Multiple-speed Europe* displays as a key indicator the "temporary" character of differentiation, and it appears to relate to the idea that the level of integration increases as the nation-states develop 'common rules and standards, rights and obligations through inter-unit processes' (Olsen 2001: 327). All the other models underline the character of differentiation as "permanent". The *Multiple standard* and *Avant-garde Europe* models assume that differentiation is "permanent". In the remaining dimensions these models follow the *Multiple Speed* model and ascribe a key role to nation-states. An increase of the level of integration might be expected as nation-states coordinate their policies in an *ad hoc* and pragmatic way, based on self-interest or unit-specific norms (Olsen 2001). The *Flexible Integration* model assumes that differentiation occurs "also outside the EU treaties" and involves "only member states". The key dimension of this model relates to the aim of establishing 'functional regimes with sector-specific differentiation' (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012: 294), as differentiation occurs "also outside the EU treaties". The *Variable Geometry* and the *Europe à la carte* models occur "also outside the EU treaties" and involve "also non-member states". While the *Europe à la carte* model is fully based on intergovernmental decision-making, the *Variable Geometry* model underlines the role of external governance in extending the 'EU's *acquis* to non-member states' (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012: 294).

The models above appear to take the EU and the nation-states as the main reference points. However, differentiated integration cannot turn a blind eye to institutional factors promoting discretionary decisions and practices nuancing differentiated integration. The models of *Optimal Level of Jurisdiction*, *Flexible Cooperation* and *Functional Overlapping Competing Jurisdictions* assume that 'legislative competencies should be allocated to the adequate levels of jurisdiction. Local problems ought to be solved at the communal level' (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012: 295). These models involve a multi-level approach and include sub-national jurisdictions, although they point to a lower level of integration. For instance, the model of *Flexible Cooperation* 'implies the sacrificing of the idea of unitary states and a unitary EU and might gradually dissolve inner European borders' (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012: 296). Differentiated integration as a descriptive concept is useful to understand how Bologna is building the EHEA in practice, and these models provide the theory of differentiated integration with an explanatory potential that will be further critically explored below.

DIFFERENTIATED INTEGRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In spite of the fact that European higher education has traditionally been assumed as an area of national remit, in the last fifteen years the EU concern with the political coordination of the sector has increased. The development of a EU system of governance 'is the result of a process guided by the logic and practice of differentiated integration' (De Neve 2007: 504). This brings to the fore a multi-layered system of decision-making responsible for enacting and stocktaking the processes and, simultaneously, persuading relevant policy actors at the national and sub-national levels to coordinate the achievement of EU policy goals.

European higher education policies have been coordinated on the basis of soft law, namely the OMC. Bologna's policy framework, while prescribing the degree structure as a recommended configuration, acts and responds to the beliefs and expectations that actors have at different levels. Bologna illustrates what has been designated as *framing* integration when it

> neither prescribes concrete institutional requirements nor modifies the institutional context for strategic interaction, but affects domestic arrangements even more indirectly, namely by altering the beliefs and expectations of domestic actors (Knill and Lehmkhul 1999: 2).

However, the adoption of policies moving around principles (e.g. transparency, comparability, legibility and instruments such as the degree structure, the credit system or the Diploma Supplement)

induces different actors' meanings and expectations (Neave & Veiga, 2013). This *framing* integration may put at risk the establishment of a more complete and far-reaching Europe, as indeed Bologna has 'resulted in 47 Bolognas with common traits' (Rudder 2010: 18). To assess the contribution of the theory of differentiated integration for understanding Bologna, we need to take into account that, on the one hand, the Bologna process, although voluntarily enacted, has support in national and institutional elements and is promoting discretionary decisions and practices, nuancing differentiated integration, and thus allowing for flexibility. Actually, national agendas reflect, more or less directly, cultural, institutional and socio-economic factors that might enact integration or differentiation depending on the 'cognition and perceptions concerning problems and their solution' (Heinze and Knill 2008: 495). On the other hand, critical attention must be paid to the fact that Bologna has been pointed out as *Flexible Integration* (at the start) and as *Europe à la carte* on the assumption that differentiation is a long lasting feature. The national appropriation of European policies (Musselin 2009) illustrates how the Bologna process is realised in and through practice. From the perspective of integration, national institutions appear as *executors* of European policies (Neave and Amaral 2012), and the characteristics of national higher education systems emerge as 'an illegitimate brake upon the drive by Europe towards a multinational system of higher education' (Neave and Amaral 2012: 15). These national brakes correspond to the enactment of national discretionary decisions and practices feeding differentiated integration.

European, national and higher education institutions share the executive power to implement Bologna. Projecting its principles is foremost a primary responsibility of national institutions (e.g. governments) as they set up the legal framework. However, higher education institutions transpose and interpret the Bologna precepts according to their own priorities. As Johan Olsen (2001) pointed out:

> A major historic development in Europe is the emergence of differentiated and partly autonomous institutional spheres with distinct logics of action, meanings and resources. Each sphere legitimizes different participants, issues, and ways of making, implementing and justifying decisions (Olsen 2001: 340).

At the institutional level, policy actors re-construct policy as they adjust the policy framework to their own agendas (Neave and Veiga 2013) while factoring in policy enactment. The establishment of the EHEA as "permanent differentiation" will be dealt with when discussing the issues of establishing a deadline for its accomplishment as the implications of flexibility in lowering the standards required for integration, challenges integration in the long run.

METHODS AND DATA

This article uses secondary analysis to understand differentiated integration with regard to the Bologna process. To this end we gathered existing data from Germany, Italy, Norway and Portugal as these countries have experienced forms of differentiated integration. Germany, Italy and Portugal are EU member states and participate in the same projects of differentiated integration (Ondarza 2013); for instance, Eurozone, Fiscal Pact, Schengen Agreement, Chart of Fundamental Rights (Ondarza 2013). In turn, Norway is a non-EU member state but its affiliation in the European Economic Area (EEA) might be considered a form of differentiated integration (Egeberg and Trondal 1999; Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012). In these countries there is evidence of differentiated integration in several policy areas and in this article we want to see how far this is visible in the higher education sector, where European policies are supposed to be much more on the periphery, as they continue to be under the national remit.

The qualitative data were collected from national reports and from information provided by the ENIC/NARIC gateway www.enic-naric.net/. National reports (Germany, 2005, 2007, 2009; Italy, 2005, 2007, 2009; Norway, 2005, 2007, 2009; Portugal, 2005, 2007, 2009) were produced by the signatory countries for the periodic conferences of Ministers, including the use of stocktaking to appraise the outcomes of policy enactment. Quantitative data are also used, relying on the results of a survey carried out in 2008. The questionnaire was sent to academic staff, administrators and management staff and students in seven universities located in the selected countries. The questionnaire covered four disciplines - law, history, medicine and physics. The survey was part of an in-depth study into specific dimensions involved in the implementation of Bologna. Views were sought on three aspects of the Bologna process: its impact as a policy; its embeddedness in the university setting; and the changes introduced in teaching/learning and research. In all, 2,695 individuals were approached and 947 valid questionnaires were completed and returned - a response rate of 35 per cent (see Table 2).

Table 2: Breakdown of the answers

	SAMPLE	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RESPONSE RATE
BY INSTITUTION	**2695**	**947**	**35%**
A-PT	385	304	79%
B-PT	385	267	69%
C-IT	385	113	29%
D-IT	385	82	21%
E-GE	385	63	16%
F-NO	385	88	23%
G-NO	385	30	8%
BY DISCIPLINARY FIELD	**2520**	**872**	**35%**
Law	630	231	37%
Physics	630	226	36%
History	630	212	34%
Medicine	630	203	32%
BY THE THREE ESTATES*	**2695**	**947**	**35%**
Academic staff	840	321	38%
Students	1680	551	33%
Administrative & Management staff	175	75	43%

PT: Portugal; IT: Italy; GE: Germany; NO: Norway
Source: Veiga 2010
* Estates are 'the constituent orders in higher education' (Neave and Amaral 2012: 39)

Descriptive statistic was used and the Kruskal-Wallis test (assuming a two-sided significance of 5 per cent) was applied to detect the existence of significant statistical differences between the views of respondents belonging to different groups, i.e. university, disciplinary field and the three categories – academic staff, students and administrative and management staff. In the analysis these variables are assumed as promoters of institutional discretionary decisions and practices and, consequently, of differentiated integration, and thus explaining the proliferation of meanings attributed by those surveyed concerning the enactment of the Bologna process.

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AND DIFFERENTIATED INTEGRATION

This section is structured into three parts: 1) the national appropriation of the Bologna process, 2) the proliferation of meanings attributed by institutional actors to the process and 3) the dimensions characterising the type of differentiated integration visible in the enactment of Bologna.

National appropriation of the Bologna process

The idea of establishing the EHEA is meant to serve the purpose of the European integration project. However, neither Bologna nor the EHEA started in a vacuum (Corbett 2005; Neave 2009). The Bologna declaration served 'a species of package deal, reflecting issues – employability, transparency and readability, etc. – already present on the agendas of most long-term Member States of the EU' (Neave 2009: 49). The theory of differentiated integration contributes to clarify how national policies, while reflecting the issues of the 'package deal', cope with obstacles to integration in European higher education. The analysis of the national reports (Germany 2005, 2007, 2009; Italy, 2005, 2007, 2009; Norway 2005, 2007, 2009; Portugal 2005, 2007, 2009) identified the need for political coordination around quality, modernisation, the need for legal changes, the restriction and enhanced rationalisation of public spending and the competitiveness of higher education systems. The development of stricter procedures for quality was underlined in the selected countries. The increased efficiency of higher education systems to reduce dropout rates was referred in the case of Germany and Italy. Concerns about the standards of international degrees (bachelor/master) awarded by their home institutions emerged in Norway and Germany. National agendas reflect coordination problems around the topics of quality procedures, efficiency and standards for international degrees. In the case of quality assurance, for instance, a European meta-governance strategy was developed to deal with the diversity of national dynamics and to ensure coherence of evaluation policies by promoting the establishment of national quality agencies and accreditation procedures (Magalhães, Veiga, Ribeiro, Sousa and Santiago 2013). These aspects interact with national factors shaping the appropriation of Bologna.

The recognition of academic degrees and diplomas is an example of how the adoption of Bologna's elements makes visible the appropriation of the process by national governments to enact the EHEA. The recognition of academic diplomas assumed a central role as an instrument for promoting student mobility within the EHEA. The topic has been in the European political agenda for more than ten years. The only legally binding element of the Bologna process – the Lisbon Recognition Convention – is not a EU instrument but rather from UNESCO and the Council of Europe. In 2007, all countries participating in the Bologna process submitted National Action Plans (NAPs) to improve the recognition of qualifications. This is an incentive measure promoted at the European level, as reporting induces comparison between states and the accomplishment of common objectives, 'but neither the guidelines nor the recommendations are legally binding, and there are no formal sanctions for countries that fail to make progress towards common objectives' (Trubek and Trubek 2005: 349).

In 2014, the European Commission acknowledged that there was no automatic EU-recognition system of academic degrees that was still dependent on national procedures influencing differentiated integration within the EHEA. In Germany, the Central Office for Foreign Education (ZAB) provides information about the European Union's general recognition guidelines supporting higher education institutions and agencies. In Italy, the Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence (CIMEA) and the ministry manage the information about this topic. Foreign academic qualifications have no legal value in Italy and the competence for academic recognition by equivalence is awarded to individual universities. In Portugal, academic recognition is also associated with the autonomy of higher education institutions and with scientific and casuistic evaluation. The Portuguese information unit for academic recognition is part of the General Directorate for Higher Education of the Ministry of Education and Science. In Germany, higher education institutions undertake the obligation of implementing the principles of the Lisbon Convention. By contrast, in Norway, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is responsible for recognizing foreign degree programmes. The Norwegian Competence Centre for Foreign Education at NOKUT provides information about the recognition system and acts as the recognition centre of the Council of Europe and of UNESCO (ENIC). The selected countries and the degree of autonomy of higher education institutions promoted discretionary decisions and practices enhancing differentiated integration in the recognition of academic degrees.

Proliferation of meanings attributed by institutional actors

Institutional actors re-construct policy as they adjust the policy framework to their agendas, thus enacting 'interpretive dispersion' (Neave and Veiga 2013: 67). As shown in Table 3, respondents belonging to different groups revealed different perceptions about the embeddedness of the Bologna instruments (e.g. Bologna degree structure, Diploma Supplement, Credit System and Quality Assurance Mechanisms).

There was evidence of statistically significant differences between all the groups on the perceptions about the implementation of the Bologna instruments with regard to the variables under examination. Respondents from University E (Germany) and respondents from History tended to recognize the *Bologna degree structure* as fully implemented, while respondents from University A (Portugal) and respondents from Law considered the implementation of the *pedagogic reform* more complete. The administrative and management staff tended more to consider the *Diploma Supplement* and *quality assurance mechanisms* as fully implemented. Relevant to the perceptions about the Diploma Supplement and quality assurance systems was also the institutional role of those surveyed. The university, institutional roles and the characteristics of academic disciplines – soft-pure (e.g. History) and soft-applied (e.g. Law) appeared as factors associated with local discretionary decisions and practices.

Moreover, the Bologna degree structure and the pedagogic reform might have been relevant in interaction with national factors. In Germany, for instance, parallel systems of traditional and new degrees went side-by-side and institutions 'had some say in how to define their degrees, and were thus encouraged to behave strategically' (Witte 2006: 199). The perceptions about the influence of the Bologna degree structure on the mobility of students, employability of graduates and efficiency of national higher education systems presented evidence of differences among groups of respondents according to their "university". Respondents from University G (Norway) tended to underline major impacts of the Bologna degree structure on these dimensions. The analysis of the perceptions of respondents from Norway suggests that "state-level factors" actively contribute to different views. In Norway, national policy-makers made ample reference to Norway's frontrunner position in implementing Bologna (Gornitzka 2006).

Table 3: Perceptions about the embeddeness of the Bologna instruments

Topics	Sub-dimension eliciting different perceptions	Who tended to be more positive?
Awareness about the embeddeness of Bologna	Pedagogic reform (38% fully implemented)	Uni A (Portugal), Lawyers
	Bologna degree structure (31% fully implemented)	Uni E (Germany), Historians
	Quality assurance mechanisms (26% fully implemented)	Administrative and management staff
	Diploma Supplement (19% fully implemented)	Administrative and management staff
Awareness about the impact of the Bologna degree structure	Increase mobility of students (38% major impact)	Uni G (Norway)
	Improvement of efficiency of national higher education system (27% major impact)	
	Improvement of employability of graduates (23% major impact)	
Awareness about the impact of the Diploma Supplement	Increase mobility of graduates (26% major impact)	Historians
	Improvement of legibility of European higher education systems (22% major impact)	Administrative and management staff
	Enhancement of the attractiveness of European higher education systems (22% major impact)	Historians
Awareness about the impact of the credit system based on the student workload	Improvement of the legibility of European higher education systems (31% major impact)	Administrative and management staff
	Enhancement of the attractiveness of European higher education systems (29% major impact)	Uni D (Italy)
	Improvement of efficiency of the national higher education system (26% major impact)	Uni A (Portugal)
	Improvement of employability of graduates (20% major impact)	Uni C (Italy)
Awareness about the impact of quality assurance	To progress on accreditation (27% agree)	Uni D (Italy), Academic staff
	Enhancement academic standards (25% agree)	Uni G (Norway)
	Reinforce public accountability (23% agree)	Uni E (Germany), Administrative and management staff

Source: Veiga 2010

The respondents from the disciplinary area of History had more positive perceptions about the impact of the Diploma Supplement on the *mobility* of students and *attractiveness* of national higher education systems. The administrative and management staff was more positive about the impact of the Diploma Supplement on the *legibility of higher education systems*. One might argue that these respondents perceived the Diploma Supplement in terms of its technical features, emphasising the influence of "sub-systemic factors" on policy enactment. From the perspective of the administrative

and management staff, alignment around procedures and common means of validating performance accelerates mechanical change as:

> (…) it is far easier to tack a consensus together and thus claim a pleasing convergence around the identification and charting of pragmatic operational procedures – good practice, shared provision and common administrative techniques – than it is to 'harmonize' or to 'create a common architecture' to accommodate differing and often deeply held values, visions and the priorities to which they give rise (Neave 2012: 18).

There were different perceptions about the impact of the credit system associated with the particular university and the institutional role of the respondents. Therefore, universities and the institutional role are institutional factors, which may enhance differentiated integration. The impacts of the credit system on *employability*, *efficiency* and *attractiveness* are related to the national agendas of the selected countries underpinning national practices interacting with the universities' institutional variables. The perceptions of the impacts of the credit system on the *legibility of European higher education systems* are related to the managerial culture of the administrative and management staff.

There were also differences with regard to the perceptions about the embeddedness of quality assurance mechanisms. Respondents from University E (Germany) tended to be more positive about the degree of implementation of quality assurance mechanisms to *reinforce public accountability*, and respondents from University D (Italy) tended to associate the implementation of those mechanisms *to progress on accreditation*. Respondents from University G (Norway) tended to be more affirmative about the impact of those mechanisms in the university to *enhance academic standards*. As these perceptions might be influenced by national agendas [e.g. in Norway, the Bologna reforms were incorporated in the national Quality Reform; in Italy the delays in implementing the evaluation policy held the reforms back (Moscati 2009)], we may conclude that the interaction between national and institutional factors contributes to differentiated integration. With regard to the influence of the institutional role as an aspect of nuancing practices of differentiated integration, the administrative and management staff tended to be more positive about the *reinforcement of public accountability*, while the academic staff tended to perceive that quality assurance mechanisms were aimed at reinforcing the role of *accreditation*. Academic staff is positioned centrally in higher education institutions and, according to previous studies undertaken in the United Kingdom, they interpret changes and are actively involved in using coping strategies (Trowler 1998). European and national initiatives in quality assurance favour accreditation as a major quality assurance instrument across Europe, influencing the interpretations of the academic staff. The present analysis shows that institutional factors such as the university, the disciplinary field and the institutional role are, respectively, linked to national agendas, academic cultures and the position of institutional actors within higher education institutions. These factors actively contribute to differentiated integration, as the flexibility inherent in it structures both the political process and its outcomes, making it problematic to take the structuration separately from the enactment of differentiated integration.

The Bologna process and models of differentiated integration

We have been arguing that the complexity of the implementation of the EHEA cannot be framed by only one or two models of differentiated integration, as proposed by Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) as the authors build a grid with polarising dimensions that do not cover all the features of policy enactment of the Bologna process. The Bologna process was put forward as an example of *Flexible Integration* (at the start) and *as Europe à la carte* model (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012). In the latter model, Bologna is argued to have differentiation as a "permanent" feature (see Table 1). However, since the deadline of 2010 to set the EHEA was established, one might question if it is really possible to envisage Bologna as a project of "permanent differentiation". The emphasis on time

landmarks pushes for 'temporary differentiation' allowing for higher levels of integration in the long run. However, the level of discretion at the national level to define procedures for academic recognition is high. Hence, ascribing relevance to "temporary differentiation", the Bologna process can be seen as an example of the *Multi-speed* model as the initiative taken by a core of member states (Germany, Italy, France and the United Kingdom) was expected to be followed by laggards (Jensen and Slapin 2011). However, the *Multi-speed* model, as it is based "only on member states" (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012), is not fully applicable because non-member states are also involved in the Bologna process.

With regard to the polarisation of "territorial differentiation" versus "purely functional differentiation", the *Europe à la carte* model focuses on "territorial differentiation". However, the range of authority and control within the Bologna process engages in policy enactment European institutions, nation-states and higher education institutions. Additionally, Bologna seems to meet the features of "functional differentiation" as national and sub-national levels and it fits "territorial differentiation" as countries outside the EU treaties are involved. The *Europe à la carte* model also underlines "differentiation at the nation-state level" in opposition to "multi-level differentiation". Bologna is an example of "differentiation at the national level" (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012) in line with the relevance of national discretionary decisions and practices impinging on the features of differentiated integration, as argued. However, it can also be taken as having features of "multi-level differentiation" as its steering mechanisms are enacted by a multi-level system where 'European countries are expected to develop further the multi-level governance system in those policy fields where the formal, legal and authority of the commission is limited, such as higher education' (Maassen and Musselin 2009: 10). The *Europe à la carte model* is based on "club decision-making (intergovernmental)", but it cannot be seen only as such. In reality, the Lisbon strategy subsumed the Bologna process enhancing the role of 'EU decision-making' and there is interference from the European Commission that assumes Bologna as an instrument for the consolidation of the EHEA. This model of differentiated integration also assumes that differentiation applies 'also for non-member states/areas outside the EU territory' (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012). Interestingly, the model of *Flexible Integration* representing Bologna, at the start, underlined that 'EU decision-making' emphasized co-operation as a means to establish the EHEA, which was first broached at the European Ministers Conference at Warsaw in 1997 as a means to enhance European co-operation in education and training in anticipating of the adhesion of 10 new member states (Marçal Grilo 2003). However, the idea of establishing the EHEA derived from intergovernmental discussions focused on how the European dimension interlocks national higher education systems. It is arguable that Bologna also assumed at the start some features of 'club decision-making (intergovernmental)' as the establishment of the EHEA was a strategic goal of the EU set out before the Bologna declaration in 1997, let alone that setting up of the EHEA was aligned with the 1992 Memorandum on Higher education in the European Community. Table 4 summarizes the shortcomings of Holzinger and Schimmelfennig's categorisation of Bologna.

Table 4: Dimensions categorising Bologna and tensions

DIMENSIONS										
1	Temporary	Permanent								
2	Territorial								Functional	
3	Differentiaion at national-level							Multi-level differentiation		
4	Only inside EU-treaties				Also outside EU-treaties			Only inside EU treaties	Also outside EU-treaties	
5	EU-decision making						Club-decision making (intergovernmental)			
6	Only member states			Also non-member states	Only member states	Also non-member states		Only member states	Also jurisdictions outside EU	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Models	**Multi-speed**	**Multiple standards**	**Avantgarde Europe**	**Core Europe, Concentric circles**	**Flexible integration**	**Variable geometry**	**Europe à la carte**	**Optimal level of jurisdiction**	**Flexible co-operation**	**FOCJ**
Examples	Many in secondary law	In secondary law, e.g. environmental policy	EMU, basic rights charta	EMU; EEA; associated states	Enhanced co-operation, Bologna (at the start)	Schengen	Bologna	Competence allocation in Lisbon Treaty	EUREGIOS	No example
References	Grabitz (1984); Stubb (1996, 2002)	Scharpf (1999)	Club von Florenz (1996)	Schäuble and Lamers (1984)	Centre for Economic Policy Research (1995)	Stubb (1996)	Dahrendorf (1979	Fischer and Schley (1999)	Holzinger 2001	Frey and Eichenbrger (1996, 1997)

Source: Adapted from Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012)

Bologna can be described as a differentiated integration project fitting the *Europe à la carte model* (see Table 4 the dimensions highlighted in grey). However, the analysis found tensions rather than polarisations in some dimensions (1. temporary versus permanent; 2. territorial versus functional; 3. differentiation at the national-level versus multi-level differentiation; and 5. EU decision-making versus club decision-making). These tensions appear to underline how differentiated integration enacts decisions and practices that challenge policy implementation as a linear policy process.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of the EHEA, based on incentive measures promoted by the EU, while relying on soft law methodologies 'aimed at initiating or facilitating reforms to be conducted at the national level' (Dehousse 2002: 10), reveals problems of coordination with regard to the levels influencing the process of structural change. Comparison between states induces the enactment of the EHEA and brings to the fore the relationship between European, national and institutional agendas. The analysis showed that in Germany, Italy, Norway and Portugal there is evidence of decisions and practices of differentiated integration resulting from the enactment of the EHEA. As argued, there are different national rules and norms to handle academic recognition while the autonomy of higher education institutions plays a role in providing flexibility to the management of academic recognition. While in Germany, Italy and Portugal similar discourses on institutional configurations (e.g. the assumption that autonomy is the privileged form for institutions to respond to changes in the environment) point to the need for institutional procedures for academic recognition; in Norway the responsibility is entrusted to a national agency.

By taking on board the concept of policy enactment, this article contributes to potentially broadening the concept of differentiated integration. While underlining how policy gets "done" requires the involvement of multiple reference points located at different levels and beyond the European Union, it also emphasises national and institutional discretionary decision-making and practices that affect patterns of differentiated integration. The contribution of the theory of differentiated integration to understanding Bologna as a process of policy enactment towards the establishment of the EHEA relies on the role attributed to factors actively involved in differentiated integration. Discretionary aspects associated with policy enactment underline how national agendas and academic cultures are influenced by their own dynamics and disciplinary values. The perceptions of institutional actors vary depending on their institutional position, from academics in the central management of higher education institutions to the administrative and management staff. In spite of the fact that the latter actors tend to be on the periphery, they create and manage organizational and professional routines moving to the centre of the institutions (Clark 1983). The national appropriation of the Bologna process and its interpretation by academics, students and administrative and management staff play a crucial role, acting as institutional mediators of differentiated integration. Thus, the analysis contributed to testing the theory of differentiated integration by analysing how national and institutional discretionary aspects contribute to influencing policy enactment.

The contribution of this article to enriching the theory of differentiated integration relies on its emphasis on the need to replace the polarisations of dimensions featuring the the models of differentiated integration (Holzinger and Schimmelfennig 2012), we suggest that this dichotomy could be replaced by a continuum between the poles of the dimensions. As the EHEA assumes hybrid features, its analysis as a project of differentiated integration brings to the fore either the need to review the models or to re-conceptualize Bologna as a EU instrument of political integration. The enactment of Bologna towards the EHEA is a process that unfolds dynamically rather than by stages, and the models of differentiated integration should capture the tensions in a spectrum. Rather than polarising, for instance, "temporary" versus "permanent" and "territorial" versus "functional", the

understanding of differentiated integration would gain from a more flexible and idiosyncratic approach, thus opening avenues for further research.

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